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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/21/2028
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [AR](#)
SUBJECT: ARGENTINA: NESTOR KIRCHNER POISED TO ASSUME
JUSTICIALIST PARTY PRESIDENCY

REF: (A) BUENOS AIRES 0196 (B) BUENOS AIRES 415 AND
PREVIOUS

Classified By: Ambassador E. Anthony Wayne for reasons 1.4 (b) & (d).

11. (U) Summary: It appears that former President Nestor Kirchner (NK) and his list will run unopposed to lead Argentina's Justicialist "Peronist" Party (PJ). April 19-20 news reports say PJ officials disqualified a second list of candidates, indicating former president NK's slate will likely win by acclamation. Kirchner's list for the party leadership positions includes five vice-presidencies: Buenos Aires governor and former Vice President Daniel Scioli, trade union federation (CGT) leader Hugo Moyano, Chaco governor Jorge Capitanich, Congressional Deputy Beatriz Rojkes (wife of the Governor of Tucuman), and Entre Rios Governor Sergio Urribarri. Kirchner appears to be methodically moving to turn the PJ into a formidable electoral machine in advance of next year's mid-term elections. End summary.

Who's In and Who's Out?

12. (SBU) Former president Nestor Kirchner (NK) presented, just before the close of the April 18 deadline, his slate for the leadership positions of Argentina's Justicialist "Peronist" party (PJ), headed by himself. He also nominated seven governors (Buenos Aires Governor Daniel Scioli, Chubut Governor Mario Das Neves, Capitanich, and Entre Rios Governor Sergio Urribarri for vice-presidencies, and Governor of Salta Juan Uturbey for Party Secretary of the Interior, San Juan Governor Jose Luis Gioja for Party Secretary of Organization, and Mendoza Governor Celso Jaque for Party Treasurer) to party positions, an acknowledgement of the political weight of provincial leaders. Fissures started appearing between the administration and some of the governors during the recent rural strikes. NK's incorporation of these governors is tactical -- he included PJ governors from some of the most important provinces to re-energize the national scope of the party and to deflect criticism that surfaced during the rural strikes.

13. (C) The biggest surprise was Kirchner's inclusion of Chubut governor Mario Das Neves for the position of Secretary of Party Coordination. Das Neves recently made headlines with his public criticism of Cabinet Chief Alberto Fernandez (who is also on the list as candidate for Party Secretary General) for his handling of the rural sector strikes (ref B). The Kirchners do not brook much criticism of their inner circle, let alone public criticism, so much of the press concluded that Das Neves had incurred the Kirchners' wrath. The inclusion of Das Neves on Kirchner's slate suggests, however, that he is no longer on the outs, if he ever was. (A couple of pundits had posited that Das Neves launched his public criticism of Alberto Fernandez at the behest of Nestor Kirchner, not in defiance of him. Das Neves told the Ambassador last week that he just didn't want to see too much

power in Alberto Fernandez's hands, but that all was okay now.) Pundits were divided over how to interpret the party position (Secretary General) offered to Alberto Fernandez, but most interpreted it as a vote of confidence for the beleaguered Cabinet Chief.

¶4. (U) Notably absent from the Kirchner slate is the governor of Cordoba (Argentina's second most important province) Juan Schiaretti, who had also criticized the government's handling of the agricultural strike. Schiaretti is only on the list as a party member. Completely absent from the list is former Economy Minister Roberto Lavagna, who came in third place in the 2007 elections as the candidate of the Radical-based UNA, was not on the Kirchner slate despite their highly publicized (and much criticized) reunion and rejoining of forces in January. Lavagna had reportedly wanted a PJ vice-presidency but was offered a secretariat position, which he refused. (Lavagna subsequently wasted no time in asserting his autonomy. April 20 newspapers aired his criticism of the GOA's export taxes on agricultural exports and the Kirchner administration's failure to contain inflation.)

Dissidents Dismissed

¶5. (U) NK's list did not go unchallenged at first -- dissident Peronists presented another list led by former Senator and vice presidential candidate Hector Maya and supported by San Luis governor Alberto Rodriguez-Saa. The vice-presidential running mates included Daniel Basile, Teresa Gonzalez Fernandez (ex-wife of Felipe Sola, the previous governor of Buenos Aires), Olga Ruitort (ex-wife of former Cordoba governor Juan Manuel de la Sota), Carlos Dellepiane, San Juan's Senator Liliana Negre de Alonso, and Horacio Alonso. On the evening of April 18, however, PJ

electoral authorities announced that Maya's list needed 66,000 more signatures to be valid. The list also lacked the geographical distribution requirement of representatives from five different districts. The dissident list's reported failure to comply with the regulations will facilitate NK's expected assumption as party president by acclamation.

Comment

¶6. (C) Barring an unlikely challenge to the dismissal of the dissident slate, NK is poised to be declared the winner of the PJ presidency as early as April 22. The PJ remains the most potent political brand in Argentina, largely because of its identification with the Peronist movement. NK is working with an eye towards the 2009 legislative elections, determined to make them a show of Kirchner strength in order to sustain his wife's administration. While NK is methodically moving ahead to turn the PJ into a formidable machine, the opposition shows little sign of responding in kind. It remains fractious, disorganized, and marginalized. End comment.
WAYNE